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▼ ADVISOR REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

“Passport to Information Day” as a Promotion Tool

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“If you build it, they will come” (Frankish & Robinson, 1989) was a powerful motivation for transforming an Iowa cornfield into a baseball diamond, but does it apply to librarians when faced with purchasing new information resources? What happens if you buy it and no one comes? This is precisely the dilemma many libraries face when purchasing new resources. Librarians painstakingly select the best resources for their users, despite overcoming budget constraints, only to have the usage statistics show that these resources are continually underutilized. This issue has mystified librarians for years. How can a library effectively market its electronic resources to its users and increase the usage?

“In this day of downloads from Kazaa, ‘Live Journal’ communities, and ‘blogs’ with names like ‘Snoop Doggy blog,’ libraries have to fight for the attention of our users, and we are losing the battle” (Sass, 2002). The day of being the only game in town is over. Libraries are now competing for the attention of their users. But why do users not think of the library and its resources when they need information? Do our users not care about library resources? Do they consider the library only when they need to do research? Or, do our users simply not know the types of resources now offered by their libraries? Not so long ago, when a user needed information, he or she had to go into the library to find it. Today, many libraries house fewer and fewer hard-copy printed materials and, instead, offer access to the same material in an electronic format. Many libraries are now working toward “electronic only” formats. This transition is because of budget and space constraints as well as advances in technology. But, how does a library alert its users to this new trend? How does the message get out that many of the library’s resources can be accessed online? Libraries and their librarians need to learn to become more effective marketers.

Background

The Alvin Sherman Library, Research, and Information Technology Center at Nova Southeastern University (NSU) is one of four NSU libraries. The Alvin Sherman Library is a joint-use facility with the Broward County Board of County Commissioners. To be a joint-use facility means that the library is “a common physical facility from which library services are provided to two ostensibly different communities of users” (Haycock, 2006). In this instance, the library serves the traditional academic community of NSU, and the residents of Broward County. Therefore, the library and its librarians need to find new and innovative ways to market and promote its electronic resources to both the NSU users and the residents of Broward County.

The Broward County Library system does promote NSU’s resources and events, through its monthly *Bookings* publication. The Alvin Sherman Library also promotes its resources through a variety of methods including the University’s publication, *SharkBytes*, the NSU libraries’ publication, *Tidings*, and through fliers, e-mails to faculty, student orientation, and training events. The librarians do an extraordinary job assisting different types of users regardless of each user’s research ability. The Alvin Sherman Library promotes its resources at various University and community events. This traditional promotion

of library resources was effective in the past, but there is much more that can be done. The library staff wanted to try different promotional or marketing techniques than had been tried in the past. They wanted to find a way to bring the electronic resources of the library directly to the users.

To that end, the search for a different way began with discussions between librarians and sales personnel from those publishing companies to whose products the library regularly subscribes. The sales personnel were asked if they would be interested in traveling to the library in Ft. Lauderdale to demonstrate only those products that the library already owns or leases. They were also requested to bring an item that could be used for a drawing. It was explained that this would be used to attract the users with prizes, but the true prize would be an increased knowledge of the library resources. The main concern expressed by the vendors about this event was how to ensure that the users actually stop by the tables to talk with the sales people and not just bypass everything and enter the drawing. This concern was considered valid and needed to be addressed. To solve this problem, “Passport to Information” was born.

The decision was made to create a passport with all the names of the publishing companies that were participating in the event. Once the user or customer stopped by a vendor’s table for a demonstration, the sales person would then stamp the passport. The users only had to stop at eight of the 12 tables to be eligible to enter the drawing. Once they had visited the minimum number of tables, then the users were allowed to stop at the prize table to validate their passports and enter the drawing. Each user was requested to fill out a survey on the back of the passport. This survey was not an element in the drawing eligibility nor was any user information requested on the passport.

Methodology

It was important that both the planning and staging of the event be as organized and professional as possible. Goals needed to be set and evaluation techniques needed to be defined to assess the effectiveness of the event. The concept of SMART goals was used. The SMART goal criterion breaks down a project into different parts. The SMART goals require the individual to create “specific, measurable, acceptable, realistic and timely goals” (Merritt and Berger, 1998).

The first condition of the SMART goals requires specificity. The event was specific because “Passport to Information Day” (a one-day event) was set for the predetermined date of October 19, 2006. The second criterion of measurability was fulfilled on the day of the event; the completed Passports to Information could be counted. The effect of this event on the usage statistics would be measured over the following months. The only problem encountered would be the measuring of the usage statistics comparing October 2006’s statistics with October 2005’s statistics. In October 2005, the University was closed for a week following Hurricane Wilma. Many of the classes did not resume for almost two weeks, which caused the electronic resources usage statistics to plummet. A determination was made not to compare the usage

statistics of October 2005 with the usage statistics of October 2006 because the results would not be valid. Instead the comparisons were made from November 2005 through December 2006, with an emphasis placed on the difference in usage between November 2005 and November 2006.

“Passport to Information Day” was achievable because the sales people agreed to attend the event and because several groups of librarians from different areas of the NSU library community each agreed to demonstrate an electronic resource routinely used in their library. For example, NSU Librarians from the Alvin Sherman Library reference department demonstrated Ask a Librarian, a statewide chat reference, and the Alvin Sherman Library public library services demonstrated the product, tutor.com. Similarly, the law librarians handed out information to the public that explained that the law library is a United States government and United Nations depository. The brochures described the type of information that is available.

The next criterion to be met is relevancy. This event was relevant because of the marketing and promotion of electronic resources is an issue that all libraries are facing. The final SMART criterion is a timeline for the project’s completion. There was a definite timeline for the project in that all preparations had to be finished by the day of the event. The event was the final item in the project. Once the project was complete, the usage statistics could be monitored to determine if those resources that had been showcased for “Passport to Information Day” had an increase in usage.

“Passport to Information Day”

“Passport to Information Day” was set for October 19, 2006. All the sales people had RSVP’d a couple of months prior to the event. The sales people who participated were from CSA, Greenwood, H.W. Wilson, Proquest, Thomson Gale, Thomson West, Wiley InterScience, World Book, Stat!Ref, Nova Southeastern University’s Law Library, Nova Southeastern University’s Alvin Sherman Library Reference and Public Library services departments. The sales people also forwarded their computer information for access to the library’s wireless network prior to the event. Some of the sales people had sent their promotional materials ahead, including the promotional item for the drawing. All the drawing items were placed in a locked display case in the middle of the library’s atrium.

There were a couple of challenges that needed to be overcome that day. First of all, there were problems getting the sales people’s computers on the wireless network. The University’s Office of Information Technology (OIT) arrived at the library and quickly solved this problem. There were a couple of sales people who continued to have computer problems, so a library laptop computer was loaned to those who could not connect to the network. Secondly, the power cords were not properly placed until the eleventh hour. This caused the library personnel concern. Finally, all the problems were worked out and “Passport to Information Day” began.

Library volunteers were placed throughout the atrium to assist both the demonstrators and the participants. Volunteers were placed at the entrance to the library. These volunteers handed out passports and tried to attract interest from those people who were just passing by the library. Finally, there were volunteers stationed at the prize table. These volunteers verified that the participant visited the number of tables needed to qualify for the drawing. The volunteers requested that the participants fill out a survey located on the back of the passport form.

The participants came from Nova Southeastern University faculty, students, and staff. In addition, there were public library users who

attended the event. The participants were given their Passports to Information and sent into the atrium to talk with the sales people. This event was a tremendous experience for everyone involved. The participants were exposed to the many products that the Nova Southeastern Libraries offer. Many were astonished by the types of electronic resources that are offered. A faculty member stated that his students ask for extra credit assignments. He decided that he would give extra credit to those students who scheduled and attended an individual research instruction lesson from a librarian. Unfortunately, the majority of students do not take advantage of the individual research instruction taught by the librarians. A student told the volunteers that he did not care if he won any of the drawing items. He thought that the real prize was what he learned by attending the event. Another student who was in his last year at NSU expressed astonishment that he never knew about these resources. He stated that he thought he would have been more productive if he had learned about these resources three years earlier.

Even the demonstrators learned something. Many of the sales people do not normally have a chance to talk directly with the users in the normal course of their jobs. This event gave them a chance to talk with the end user and learn about his or her concerns and searching habits.

At the end of the day, 152 Passports to Information were completed and eligible for the drawing. The categories of the visitors break down as follows: 37.5 percent of the visitors were undergraduate students, 22.4 percent general public, 3.3 percent faculty, 1.3 percent alumni, 11.8 percent graduate students, 11.2 percent NSU staff members, and unknown 12.5 percent. According to the survey, the most popular database was Proquest followed by Stat!Ref. The visitors complimented the three booths staffed by library personnel. Of those visitors who completed the survey, 107 stated that they would attend a similar function. The visitors requested additional training in Tutor.com, Worldbook, Proquest, and all the other databases demonstrated. The written response on the survey form for additional training, ranged from general business, computer, history, medical science, legal, scientific, medieval, and literature internet. Training was requested on other databases and full-text journals, along with internet tips and tricks.

The usage statistics for the databases that were featured on “Passport to Information Day” show an average increase in the number of sessions of 9.07 percent. The number of sessions for these databases in the month that followed the event increased 41.65 percent over the same month the previous year.

Conclusion

Librarians are struggling with the issue of marketing and publicizing their electronic resources. Libraries are subscribing to or purchasing electronic resources, but these resources are underutilized. Libraries and their librarians must learn how to publicize and market their

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resources. Passport to Information Day, an event created by the librarians at Nova Southeastern University was a wonderful event for everyone involved. The vendors learned a little about the end users. The end users were further exposed to the electronic resources that are offered at libraries at Nova Southeastern University. And, the librarians were able to showcase databases they considered important to the public. It was a day of learning and a day of fun.

The event received praise from the marketing director in the library along with others at NSU. Passport to Information Day was so successful that it may become an annual event. If you build it, they may not automatically come, but you will have better attendance if you let them know it's there.

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▼ ADVISOR OP-ED

Scraping By on \$7 Million a Year

By Margaret Landesman, *Head, Collection Development, Marriott Library, University of Utah*

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Whenever we talk about electronic resources, the phrase that comes up is: "We have no money." I am tired of hearing myself say, "We don't have the money." Is this true?

We have money. My campus spends \$7 million a year on library materials. Most of the libraries in my state and even my country—and certainly many other countries—would think this a handsome sum. We are spending ten times that—\$75 million—to gut and rebuild our building. Our 1968 building doesn't meet earthquake standards; and in a large quake it would pancake.

Of course, we didn't know this when we started poking around in the walls, because we wanted to gut and rebuild it. It's an indisputable, but conveniently discovered, fact. The building trumped collections—before we knew we had a safety issue. Many libraries, public and academic, seem to be finding this.

Why?

Maybe the balance has tipped. Dollars invested elsewhere produce greater user benefits than dollars invested in collections?

Despite putting collections at top of the institution's priorities and funneling a substantial percentage of the new money coming into the university into them, we have not succeeded in meeting the needs of our graduate student and faculty users.

We calculated what it would cost to reinstate just the 4,000 journals Marriott Library has cut over the past decade. These titles cost \$2 mil-

lion at the date of cancellation and would cost \$2.8 million today. If you add in the Health Science Library cuts and the cuts in book and standing order and binding budgets, it's much higher than that.

Users remain unhappy—in Utah and nationally—about their access to journals. Would more money solve this problem? Not really. Libraries that spend millions more than we do still report unhappy grad students and faculty.

Libraries, like their campus administrations, have lost hope of ever being able to buy enough of what the faculty wants to make them significantly happier than they are now.

Our funding sources, I believe, have a renewed faith in the belief that research libraries are black holes. Not that they didn't always think that, but now they are really sure. And I kind of think I may be coming to agree with them.

Perhaps our best course as a university is to continually refine how we spend the \$7 million we have, put in place services to purchase, rent, lease, borrow, (or I know some publishers believe) steal information as it is needed, and stop asking for more money in a world in which we aren't going to get any anyway.

What (other than no) might "We have no money" really mean?

- Maybe it's not compelling enough for the library to be willing to do the work and take the flack to free funding?